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Consideration of the Budget Resolution

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Summary

Consideration of a concurrent budget resolution is governed by special procedures in the House and Senate. Although the procedures of each chamber differ, they serve generally to expedite consideration of the budget resolution. For more information on the budget process, see <http://www.crs.gov/products/guides/guidehome.shtml>.

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Initial Consideration in the Senate

The Congressional Budget Act of 1974 (Titles I-IX of P.L. 93-344), as amended, outlines the congressional budget timetable in Section 300, and sets April 1 as the date the Senate Budget Committee should report the budget resolution to the Senate floor. Once on the floor, the budget resolution is considered under rules set forth in Section 305(b) of the Budget Act. To expedite the consideration of the budget resolution, the rules limit the amount of time for debate and prohibit certain amendments and motions.

Debate on the initial consideration of a budget resolution, and all amendments, debatable motions, and appeals, is limited to not more than 50 hours. Generally, the time allotted for debate on a budget resolution is equally divided between, and controlled by, the majority leader and the minority leader or their designees, usually the chair and ranking minority member of the Senate Budget Committee. Section 305(b)(5) of the Budget Act prohibits debate on any motion further limiting debate. After opening statements, up to four hours may be designated for debating economic goals and policies. Debate on any amendments is limited to two hours each, equally divided between the mover of the amendment and the budget resolution floor manager. Any amendment to an amendment, debatable motion, or appeal is limited to one hour of debate. A motion to recommit may be debated for no more than one hour. When the Senate considers a budget resolution that revises a budget resolution already in place (under Section 304 of the Budget Act), debate is limited to only 15 hours.

These provisions limit the length of debate, but do not limit the offering of amendments or motions. After the 50 hours of debate has been reached, consideration of amendments, motions, and appeals may continue, but without debate. The Senate, however, usually adopts a unanimous consent agreement establishing what amendments to a budget resolution will be considered. Notwithstanding a unanimous consent agreement, the rules set forth in Section 305(b) of the Budget Act prohibit certain amendments and motions, including any amendment not germane to the provisions of a budget resolution; any amendment on economic goals and policies unless the budget resolution includes economic goals, and the amendment proposes to change such goals and the budgetary levels to achieve those goals; and a motion to recommit, unless the motion includes instructions to report back within a certain number of days, not to exceed three days that the Senate is in session.

Initial Consideration in the House

In the House, there is no deadline for the House Budget Committee to report a budget resolution to the floor, as there is in the Senate. When a budget resolution is reported, it may be called up for consideration at any time thereafter, subject to the three-day availability requirement under clause 4 of House Rule XIII. A motion to proceed to consider a budget resolution is “highly privileged,” not debatable, and not amendable.

The Budget Act sets forth rules regarding House floor consideration of a budget resolution similar to the Senate provisions, but the House regularly adopts a special rule reported by the House Rules Committee establishing the amount of time allotted for debate and what amendments will be in order, superseding these provisions. General debate frequently is limited to about five hours.

The special rule typically has allowed for consideration of only amendments in the nature of a substitute to the budget resolution.

Consideration of the Budget Resolution Conference Report

Although the concurrent budget resolution does not become law, it still must be adopted in identical form by both the House and the Senate. Therefore, once each chamber adopts its budget resolution, the differences must be resolved, usually in a conference committee. The rules, and recent practices, governing the consideration of a conference report on a budget resolution once again are intended to expedite final action on the floor.

Section 305(c) of the Budget Act outlines several provisions relating to the consideration of the conference report on a budget resolution in the Senate. A motion to proceed to consider a budget resolution conference report may be made at any time, even when a previous motion to the same effect has been defeated. Debate on the conference report, and all amendments and debatable motions and appeals, is limited to not more than 10 hours. Any motion or appeal related to the conference report may be debated for no more than one hour. As with the initial consideration of a budget resolution in the Senate, these provisions may be superseded by a unanimous consent agreement.

While the Budget Act includes rules for House consideration of a conference report on a budget resolution (Section 305(a)(6)), a conference report regularly is considered under a special rule, usually limiting the length of debate to one hour.

The Budget Act requires final action on the budget resolution to be completed on or before April 15. This date, however, is more a target than an enforceable deadline; there are no procedural penalties if Congress does not adopt a budget resolution by this date. Congress usually completes action on a budget resolution in May or June.

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